“The Barber”

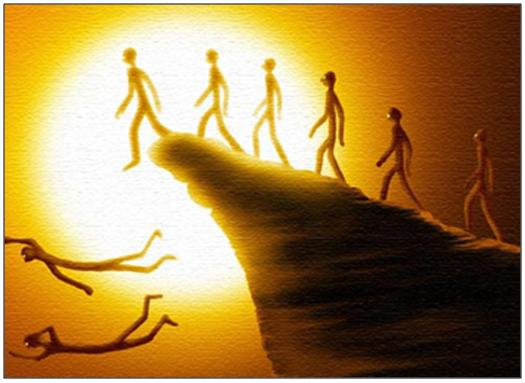
By: Flannery O’Connor

1. “The Barber” by Flannery O’Connor is based around the conflict between the liberal protagonist, Rayber, and the conservative antagonist as they discussing their personal political views. O’Connor begins the short story in a barbershop, which is the main setting of the fable. The question, “Who are you gonna vote for?” is brought up in the exposition when Rayber’s first visit to the barber, and the entire short story revolves around this question. The barber continues to push his conservative political views on Rayber, but Rayber does not seem to care what he has to say about blacks and does not say much. Rayber did not desire to come into the shop and discuss politics, but he knows he will not change his views based on the barber’s argument so he sits back and listens, although he just wants to tell the barber to hurry up and finish the haircut. Leaving the shop, Rayber ponders the discussion for a short period of time, but by the time his next visit to the barber comes he had forgotten all about their previous discussion. The barber brings up politics once again at Rayber’s second haircut when he asks if Rayber still planned to vote for the Democratic candidate, Darmon, in lieu of the Republican candidate, Hawkson. Another stock character then enters the fable. A white fat man, who is against integration as most whites then were, chimes in on the conversation and argues against Rayber’s view. Rayber begins to get infuriated this time, and says he will prepare a speech to present to the fat man and the barber of why he is voting for Darmon. Rayber practices the speech with his friend and wife, who support Hawkson, and they say it is a well written paper. Rayber presents the speech to the barber and the fat man, who also say it is a well written paper, but would not change their minds. Rayber grows infuriated as epiphany occurs and he realizes no one is going to agree with him no matter how arduously he tried. The dénouement occurs in the last sentence when Rayber he punches the barber after growing so angry, and then leaves the shop (more of just a conclusion than a resolution.) Rayber can be seen as a dynamic character after this action because his realization changed his view of the antagonist, and at the exposition of the story Rayber was indifferent, but by the dénouement his indifference changes to infuriation. The antagonist character, the barber, does not undergo a change as he is only worried about his political views the entire story, and never shows any change throughout the fable, so he is a static character.

2. The short stories “A Good Man is Hard to Find” and “The Barber”, both written by Flannery O’Connor, contain several similarities in setting, theme, and protagonist. In “A Good Man is Hard to Find” the setting is in a mid 20th century timeframe. The story takes place first in a town, one that doesn’t seem to be huge but the audience can’t be too sure, and then switches to a rural setting. In “The Barber” the setting is also in the mid 20th century however the setting takes place in a more urban town. The reader can assume this because there is a university in the town. These two stories relate because of the time periods they are in, they are both in a developed, yet pre-modern era of the United States and a form of realism.

The two stories also relate in theme. In “A Good Man is Hard to Find” one theme is that nobody is who you think they are, because the Grandmother thought The Misfit was a good man, but he ended up being a bad man and killing her. In “The Barber” one theme is that some people are easily angered and some easily anger other people because Rayber gets really mad at the barber and the barber is only speaking his mind and it is just pushing Rayber’s buttons. Both stories possess common themes that are centered on the personalities of humans and their faults.

The types of characters in both stories are also related in that they are both dynamic characters. In “A Good Man is Hard to Find” the Grandmother is easily angered by the family and is persistent in making the family go to East Tennessee to avoid the Misfit. In “The Barber”, Rayber is determined to prove the Barber wrong and show him and everybody else that they are wrong for choosing the other guy for the election. Both stories are related this way in that the main character in both is determined to obtain their goal and prove that they are right. Also, all of the other characters seem to be against them, with the family and the Misfit for the Grandmother and the Barber and Rayber’s friends for Rayber.



3. This image connects the theme of both of the short stories “A Good Man is Hard to Find” and “The Barber”. The general theme is about the faults of the protagonists and how they change to get themselves in trouble. The dynamic characters both changed throughout the story and are the reasons for their misfortune. This is shown in this symbolic image. In the image, the people are walking off of the cliff and bringing peril to themselves, which is exactly what Rayber and the Grandmother did in both of the short stories. The picture is symbolic to the fault of humans and therefore connects the themes of the two short stories.